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ABSTRACT

Individuals utilize many cues from their environments in order to assess their status. A person's status may be conceptualized as being made up of the roles the individual plays. One role individuals may play at some point in their life is the role of victim. This study sought to determine whether or not individuals possess a veridical assessment of the likelihood of being victimized. College students (N=29) responded to a questionnaire concerning the likelihood of victimization. It was revealed that members of both genders incorrectly assessed the probability of being victimized. Males tended to deflate the probability, while females inflated the probability. This led to females reporting a significantly higher perceived likelihood of being victimized than males. U.S. Department of Justice statistics indicate that at ages 12 and up males are more likely than females to be victims of criminal activity. Although the differences between genders in victimization rate is greatest between ages 16-25, subjects in this study reported that females were more likely to be victimized. One mechanism that may account for this discrepancy is that individuals' self-schema may be manipulated in an availability heuristic manner by mass media portrayal of victims. (ABL)

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Potential Victimization

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Gender Differences in Coping With
Potential Victimization

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Abstract

Statistics indicate that at ages 12 and up males are more likely than females to be victims of criminal activity (U.S. Department of Justice, 1989). This study sought to determine whether or not individuals possess a veridical assessment of the likelihood of their being victimized. It was revealed that members of both genders incorrectly assessed the probability of being victimized. Males tended to deflate the probability, while females inflated the probability. This led to females reporting a significantly higher perceived likelihood of being victimized than males. These results are discussed in terms of manipulation of self-schemata facilitated by mass media portrayals of victims.

Introduction

Individuals Utilize many cues from their environments in order to assess their status. A person's status may be conceptualized as being made up of the roles an individual plays. One role individuals may play at some point in their life is the role of victim. This study examined individual's views concerning the likelihood of their being victimized. These views were dichotomized by gender. Gender is not the only variable of importance. However, a study based on gender differences does provide a platform from which future research in the area can be launched.

Method

Subjects

Twenty-nine students from an undergraduate psychology course served as subjects. Seven additional subjects made errors in filling out a questionnaire utilized in this study and were subsequently discarded. The subjects consisted of 18 females and 11 males. The ages ranged from 18-26 with the average being 19.

Method

Subjects were run concurrently. At the beginning of the session subjects were given a questionnaire to fill out. This questionnaire included all of the items of

interest for this study. Demographic information was also solicited. Subjects took approximately 15 minutes to fill out the questionnaire. They were dismissed upon completion of the questionnaire.

Results

Inspection of the results indicates that female subjects reported a significantly higher likelihood of being victimized than did male subjects $t(29) = 2.22, p < .05$.

Brief Discussion

U.S. Department of Justice (1989) statistics clearly indicated that males are more likely to be the victims of all types of criminal activity (violent and property) than are females. The differences between genders in victimization rate is greatest between the ages of 16-25 (U.S. Department of Justice, 1989). In spite of these findings, the subjects in this study, all but one of which were between the ages of 16-25, reported that females were more likely to be victimized than males. One mechanism that may account for this discrepancy is that individuals' self-schema may be manipulated in an availability heuristic manner by mass media portrayals of victims. Liebert and Sprafkin (1988) report that fictional victims presented on television tend more

often to be female than male. Individuals may incorporate this media portrayal of reality into their own self-schema. These results tend to provide support for the work of Drabman and Thomas (1974, 1976), as well as the work of Bryant, Carveth, and Brown (1981) concerning the ability of television to influence viewers. This research also tends to provide some support for the work of Janoff-Bulman (1989), and Levesque, Deutsch, and Janoff-Bulman (1990) concerning the malleability of self-schemata.

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